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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 5408
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0324
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001878

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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ROME FOR MFO

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

The media reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will arrive in the country today and meet with Israel's principal ministers and PA President Mahmoud Abbas. Yesterday the Jerusalem Post reported that FM Tzipi Livni will urge the Secretary to jettison plans for a joint Israeli-Palestinian document to be presented at the UN General Assembly.

Over the weekend the media reported that Sen. Barack Obama chose Sen. Joseph Biden as his running mate. Although most media characterized Biden as "pro-Israel," Israel Hayom noted that this has not always been the case. Ha'aretz features an article on key Jewish movers and shakers at the Democratic National Convention. The Jerusalem Post reported that Denver Jews told the newspaper that Colorado is a battleground state.

Electronic media reported that last night the cabinet approved the 2009 budget, 13 to 12. Labor and Shas ministers, as well as Kadima's Shaul Mofaz, voted against the budget. Kadima Minister Haim Ramon abstained.

Ha'aretz reported that the head of the Palestinian negotiating team, Ahmed Qurei, toured in recent weeks with senior Israeli officials the area near Ariel and other settlements whose future is disputed. Political sources in Jerusalem were quoted assaying that the tour of these areas was meant to highlight the complexity for Israel in talks on matters of borders and territory. The same sources were quoted as saying that Qurei did not enter the settlements, and only viewed them from a distance. Qurei's counterpart in the talks, FM Tzipi Livni, did not participate in the tour.

The media reported over the weekend that in order to avoid a public relations debacle, Israel did not respond to the arrival of two boats bearing left-wing activists on their way to Gaza. Ha'aretz reported that Israel is not currently planning to stop or inspect the boats when they leave Gaza, because there is no intelligence indicating that the activists plan to smuggle wanted terrorists out of the Strip. The activists apparently plan to smuggle out two students who received Fulbright scholarships in the U.S., but were denied U.S. visas on security grounds (according to the newspaper). The defense establishment's current thinking is that a clash over this issue would simply play into the activists' hands by generating media attention.

Yesterday Ha'aretz reported that the U.S. will make use of missile radars in armored trailers in Europe as shields against Iran.

The electronic media reported that this morning Israel released 198 Palestinian prisoners in the West Bank, as a gesture of good will to President Abbas. Abbas was quoted as saying that there will be no peace until Israel releases all Palestinian prisoners.

Yesterday Maariv reported that Defense Minister Ehud Barak will fly to Egypt on Tuesday in order to meet in Alexandria with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Egyptian Intelligence head Omar Suleiman, and Egyptian Defense Minister Hussein Tantawi. The officials will discuss negotiations for the return of Gilad Shalit.

Citing Reuters, Ha'aretz quoted a senior Hizbullah official as saying yesterday that Israel will be targeted by thousands of rockets if it attacks Iran. The media quoted Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah as saying yesterday that his organization will respond "decisively" to any Israeli aggression. Yesterday Ha'aretz reported that the defense establishment recommended last week that Israel support extending the mandate of the international force deployed in southern Lebanon.

Yesterday Ha'aretz cited Syria's denial on Friday that it was considering hosting an advanced Russian missile system, a day after President Bashar Assad held talks with Russian officials about upgrading his country's military. Yesterday The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli defense official as saying on Saturday as saying that Syria is trying to press the U.S. to sponsor talks with Israel.

Yesterday Ha'aretz reported that Israel's leading ultra-Orthodox rabbis are waging a new campaign to prevent Jews visiting Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday police and security personnel closed down an office in the northern town of Umm al-Fahm reputedly affiliated with the Islamic Movement and linked to Islamic organizations abroad. The closure order, drafted by Defense Minister Ehud Barak, described the organization operating there as an "unrecognized association." Police in the Jezreel Valley

District were quoted as saying yesterday that they suspect the Al-Aqsa Institute, founded in 2000 by movement leader Sheikh Raed Salah, of having been operating from the location. The Defense Ministry also issued instructions to freeze the organization's bank accounts. Police sources were quoted as saying that the group was operating in cooperation with the Hamas leadership in Jerusalem. Its activity was allegedly funded in part by the "Charity Coalition," an umbrella group of hard-line Islamic foundations from around the world. Police also said that the coalition transferred large sums of money to Hamas and Al-Aqsa without proper documentation, through money changers, laundering, and bank transfers.

Leading media reported that security prisoners have complained that their prison wardens have unleashed dogs on them.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli officials as saying yesterday that Israel had not officially made a decision regarding the planned Mideast conference in Moscow. The officials stressed, however, that Jerusalem was continuing to send messages to the Kremlin that it did not want the crisis in Georgia to damage Israeli-Russian ties. The officials were quoted as saying that the Moscow conference would not only be raised during Rice's visit but also at a meeting of the Quartet in mid-September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. The Jerusalem Post reported that Likud Chairman Benjamin Netanyahu is scheduled to visit Moscow on September 11.

Yediot reported that an Iraqi court has sentenced to death the assassin of the sons of senior Iraqi official Mithal Al-Aloussi, who visited Israel in 2004.

All media reported that law enforcement authorities in the U.S. have requested the extradition of Yitzhak Abergil, who is believed to stand at the head of one of the largest crime families in Israel. American authorities have also asked for the extradition of four other persons (including Abergil's brother Meir) who are alleged to be members of the same underworld organization. Yitzhak Abergil is suspected of involvement in the 2003 murder of a drug dealer in the U.S., as well as of money-laundering and extortion. The five were indicted in the U.S. on July 23; the request for their extradition was sent to Israel last Friday.

Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Wounded and eager for some sort of positive legacy, Rice will arrive today on another frustrating mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz: "It is high time for Olmert and those who wish to succeed him to inform [settler leaders] that the rules of the game have changed."

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: "This is the strangest closure in the history of conflicts. The Israeli side wants the border crossings open; Hamas carries out terror attacks so as to make sure the border crossings are closed. But that is of no interest to the peace saboteurs."

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized: "The Left has started a new line of propaganda as a true ally of Hamas."

Block Quotes:

1I. "A Last-Ditch Attempt"

Diplomatic correspondent Aluf Benn wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (8/25): "Before bridging the differences between Israelis and Palestinians, Rice will have to pave the way between the contradictory viewpoints of her hosts in Jerusalem. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert believes that it is possible and

necessary to reach a 'shelf agreement' now.... Olmert faces opposition from both Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni. In their view, Israel must not rush. Livni believes that detailed negotiations must continue on all issues, and that Israel should avoid an unclear agreement. She also supports deferring resolution of the Jerusalem quagmire. Barak has warned against dangerous illusions, at a time when the gap between the two sides remains substantial..... On one issue, all three agree: They reject the idea put forth by Rice, to publish a document of partial agreements detailing the positions of each side on different issues.

In their view, such a document would only harm Israel and would serve as a basis for pressure in the future. Following a meeting in Washington with Rice and Abbas in late July, Livni is of the opinion that the idea will be dropped. However, Rice is keen on showing gains, especially in light of the growing criticism directed against her in the United States.... Thus, wounded and eager for some sort of positive legacy, Rice will arrive today on another frustrating mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah."

II. "Let Them Stay in Palestine"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz (8/25): "[The question Kadima voters must ask themselves on the way to the polls is] which candidate is capable of instructing the chief of staff, at 3 P.M., to evacuate 110 settlements in the West Bank. After all, this was Kadima's major promise to its voters.... It is high time for Olmert and those who wish to succeed him to inform [settler leaders] that the rules of the game have changed. State lands in the territories have never been, de jure, sovereign property of the State of Israel. From now on, they are part of the state of Palestine, and for every dunam of land that is annexed in the West Bank, we will compensate with land from Israel proper.... Yasser Arafat at one point agreed to grant Jewish settlers Palestinian citizenship, in addition to Israeli citizenship, and to provide them with full rights, including a fair apportionment of water and land resources. We only need to make sure that the Jewish minority in Palestine receives the same treatment accorded to the Arab minority in Israel. No more, no less. Or perhaps that would be too cruel."

III. "Peace Saboteurs"

Conservative Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (8/24): "This time, for a change, the top tiers of the Israeli leadership made a correct decision. The supporters of Hamas's horrific regime wanted to show the world a clash. They wanted pictures of Israeli war ships facing off against what they described in their Orwellian terminology as 'peace ships,' or IDF soldiers against 'human rights activists.' They didn't get what they were looking for. There was no clash. The major networks around the world ignored them. The low profile, on the verge of ignoring them, paid off. Their purpose was to 'break the siege.' Siege? Dozens of trucks in Israel cross every day and provide the residents of the Gaza Strip with their every need. There is no lack of money in the Gaza Strip. Iran has sent in hundreds of millions.... In very simple words, this is the strangest closure in the history of conflicts. The Israeli side wants the border crossings open; Hamas carries out terror attacks so as to make sure the border crossings are closed. But that is of no interest to the

peace saboteurs. Those war activists spoke at length about a 'humanitarian crisis.' That too is a joke.... Some of the media around the world and in Israel referred to them as 'peace activists.' But who are they really? One of the central figures who raised funds for this campaign was Riad Hammad, an Arab-American who declared his desire to see Israel destroyed and to have the Jews deported en masse. He was questioned a number of times by the FBI and committed suicide a number of months ago.... One of the supporters is Claire Short, a former British cabinet minister, who blamed Israel for global warming. And, like always, every time there is a false show of peace, there are always Israelis who are willing to join. That was the case this time as well. There is no point discussing them. This time the supporters of the terrorist regime met with failure. But we oughtn't be dismissive of them. Usually, their industry of lies wins. They lost a battle. But the war is still far from being over."

IV. "Ship of Fools"

The nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe editorialized (8/25): "The Left has started a new line of propaganda as a true ally of Hamas. It is good that Israeli and world public opinion see this picture. The moral flaw of the Left has been exposed: left-wing activists are celebrating with a happening that is all entertainment, at the expense of the blood spilled in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.... The image of the cruise and the fools adds up to that of the permanent political rioting at the construction of the fence at Na'alim.... Israel will have no choice at some point but to confront the old-new enemy -- first by curbing the riots in Na'alim, then by arresting the activists of the organizations encouraging violence."

CUNNINGHAM